

The search for the Russian Mafia

Central and Eastern European Criminals in the Netherlands, 1989–2005

Anton Weenink · Franca van der Laan

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Abstract After the fall of communism in the Soviet Union, newspapers, films, academic researchers and intelligence agencies warned against a new phenomenon in organized crime: the “Russian mafiya.” In fact, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Western European countries have noted an increase in the number of criminals from Central and Eastern Europe. In the mid-1990s, the Dutch judicial authorities made the issue a priority and established a special team to investigate crime with links to Eastern Europe. From 1999 to 2005, the KT NON crime team published several studies and reports on serious crime of this nature. In this paper, the authors, who were assigned to the KT NON crime team, discuss the findings of the two most recent publications on the “causes, nature, scale and threat of Central and Eastern European crime” and “mobile banditry,” respectively. They come to the conclusion that among other forms of crime, the phenomenon of mobile banditry seems to be the most serious manifestation of crime from post-communist countries. The Russian mafia was not found.

Keywords Russian Mafia Central · Eastern European Criminals · Netherlands · Banditry

Introduction

After the fall of communism in the Soviet Union in 1991, a new phenomenon in organized crime made the headlines: the “Russian Mafia.” Films and newspapers

A. Weenink (✉) · F. van der Laan
Netherlands Police Agency, National Crime Squad,
P.O. Box 11, 3970 AA Driebergen, The Netherlands
e-mail: Anton.Weenink@klpd.politie.nl

F. van der Laan
e-mail: Franca.van.der.Laan@klpd.politie.nl

depicted this mafia as a terrible beast bent on world domination with the help of the former Soviet Union's nuclear stockpiles.¹ This alarming message was not limited to films or sleazy tabloids in need of a scoop; academic researchers and intelligence agencies also seemed genuinely disturbed. According to CIA testimony before US Congress in 1997: "Russian organized crime has quickly become an international menace, conducting operations far beyond the Russian borders and reaching even our own shores" (Washington Times, July 25, 1997). In a similar vein, Galeotti discusses the "boundless ambition" of this Russian "mafia"²:

The Russian *mafija* is an expansionist force and has gone beyond merely preying on Russian expatriates and émigrés abroad. There is a strong *mafija* presence in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, but it has gone much further. Under the brutal and effective *vor v zakone* Ivan'kov, it has taken control of the émigré Russian gangs of New York's Brighton Beach. From there it has built a North American *Organizatsiya* that includes five major cartels, comprising 200 gangs in 17 cities, most notably in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, and Miami. The *mafija* has even established a series of national "prefects" in Canada, Crete (a major *mafija* laundry), Greece, Austria (a particular favorite of the *vory v zakone*), Germany, the Low Countries, Israel and the former Yugoslavia ... The Russian *mafija* has thus become a player in international criminal circles (Galeotti 1996, p.19).

Galeotti characterizes Russian organized crime as being highly organized with "national prefects" in several countries, including supposedly the Low Countries. In fact, by the mid-1990s, the Dutch judicial authorities identified organized crime from Eastern Europe as a priority and established a team to focus on investigating crime from this "area of attention." Originally called the *Interregionaal Rechercheteam Noord- en Oost-Nederland* (IRT NON), this organized crime investigation team was later renamed *Kernteam Noord- en Oost-Nederland* (KT NON).³ In the 5-year period from 1992 to 1997, at least a dozen Eastern Europeans were assassinated in the Netherlands. In addition, the growing number of prostitutes and car thieves from former Eastern Bloc countries alarmed Dutch authorities. Striving for "intelligence-led policing," the team also consisted of academic researchers who were to write studies on specific topics like human trafficking and broad crime pattern analyses (CBAs),⁴ strategic assessments of the causes, nature, scale and "threat"; of crime in

¹See, for example, the James Bond film *GoldenEye* (1995).

²For a similar assessment, see CSIS (1997). For a critical discussion of these studies and of CSIS (2000), see Weenink (2001).

³Teams for other areas were established as well, including organized crime related to Turkey, organized crime related to Latin America, human smuggling, financial crime, synthetic drugs, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, Port of Rotterdam and Dutch criminal networks.

⁴CBA is the Dutch acronym for *criminaliteitsbeeldanalyse* (crime pattern analysis).

and from the area of attention.⁵ Organized crime from Central and Eastern Europe was prioritized in the Netherlands until 2004, when the areas of attention were all redefined in terms of criminal activities. By that time, the team's authors, together with strategic analysts from the police, had published several reports on Eastern European organized crime.⁶ The decision to lift the prioritized status from crime from Central and Eastern Europe was not explicitly motivated by an assumed lack of threat from that region. After all, by 1 May 2004 some observers expected the threat to increase due to the accession of eight former communist countries to the EU. This gave rise to the following questions: How extensive was crime from the former communist countries? In light of the anxiety of the mid-1990s, in particular, to what extent had something akin to a Russian mafia as described by Galeotti gained a foothold in Dutch society?

In this paper, the authors, who were assigned as researchers to the crime team, discuss these issues by presenting the team's findings. The central question to be answered is whether these findings confirm the perception of the mid-1990s that the Netherlands was facing a serious threat of organized crime from Central and Eastern Europe. In other words, did that threat materialize? To address this, the central question is divided into sub-questions, which we will try to respond to in the sections below:

1. How many criminals from Central and Eastern European countries were active in the Netherlands in the period from 1996 to 2005? From which countries did they come?
2. To what extent were these criminals involved in "organized crime," "corporate crime," and "banditry"?
3. How violent were Central and Eastern European criminals?

In responding to these questions, we draw on all publications by the team on Central and Eastern European crime, focusing particularly on the two most recently published reports, viz. "Crime without frontiers" (2004) and the 2005 study on "mobile banditry" from Poland and Lithuania.⁷ The answer to the first question mainly concerns statistics on the number of registered suspects from the area of attention who came to the Netherlands in the 1996–2002 period, as discussed in "Crime without frontiers," and supplemented with more recent figures for the 2003–

⁵Initially, the team's area of attention was "Eastern Europe", which was defined as the territory of the 15 successor states of the former Soviet Union. In 2003, Central Europe was included as well. "Central Europe" was defined as the territory of the former communist countries that were to join the European Union in 2004: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), being former Soviet republics, were already part of the area of attention. The territory of the former German Democratic Republic was not included. The area of attention also did not include the former communist countries of Southeastern Europe, viz. the successor states of former Yugoslavia (excluding Slovenia), Bulgaria, Rumania, and Albania.

⁶In 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2004, the team published the following CBAs: KT NON 1999; KT NON 2000; KT NON 2002 and KLPD/DNR 2004. The team also published specialized studies on human trafficking, extortion, auto theft and lorry hijacking in Russia. In 2005, a final report on mobile banditry from Poland and Lithuania was published (KLPD/DNR 2005).

⁷"Crime without frontiers was written by Anton Weenink, Franca van der Laan and Sander Huisman"; was also published in English.

2005 period that were quickly available. The second question focuses on whether we were actually dealing with “organized crime” or with other ways in which criminals “organize” their activities. The use of violence is often seen as a characteristic aspect of “organized crime” and of the Russian “*mafia*” in particular. The violent nature of crimes can be assessed quite directly using crime statistics and our qualitative analysis.

Definitions

In “Crime without frontiers,” the CBA on Central and Eastern European organized crime for the 2002–2003 period, we took an “upside down approach” to concepts and data collection. As the task was to draft a CBA on Eastern European “organized crime,” we could not simply leave it to our “information suppliers” to define this concept. Rather than focus only on criminal files that had already been qualified by investigators as “organized crime,” all data on serious offences committed by Eastern Europeans and on individual subjects were collected from the 25 Dutch police districts and from specialist investigative agencies. By pooling and analyzing these data, we tried to assess which relationships existed between criminals. We referred to cases involving at least two criminals in one or more crimes as “combinations of suspects.” We then considered whether the “combinations of suspects” identified could be deemed “organized crime,” “corporate crime” or “banditry.”

As existing definitions did not delineate these concepts, we had to invent our own.⁸ In our approach, “organized crime” was defined as crime on illegal markets and primarily involving wholesale trade, in which quantities of illegal goods are bought with a view to selling and not consumption.⁹ “Banditry” referred to groups involved in property crimes. “Corporate crime” was defined as crime committed by administrators of legal organizations.¹⁰

This method of collecting data on suspects resulted in a much larger data set than would have been possible had we relied on investigation files on “organized crime,” that were selected according to more conventional (and vague) definitions. Despite this fact, the data proved to be anything but complete and the quality left

⁸Many criminologists seem to have difficulty in realizing that a definition is not the same as a description. They are not to be assessed by their empirical validity, but rather by their usefulness.

⁹The exact definition of “organized crime” was: “The combinations of suspects that commit two or more offences on illegal markets that are punishable by four years or more of imprisonment are included in organized crime” (KLPD/DNR 2004, p. 33).

¹⁰In a more recent approach that refines the definition applied in “Crime without frontiers”, we redraw boundaries somewhat. “Organized crime” entails “trade crime” (crime on illegal markets) and “banditry”. In “trade crime” we tend to include one-man businesses as well. The “combinations of suspects” active as independent buyer or seller can be considered “criminal enterprises” (Van Duyne et al. 2006). Any wholesale buyer or seller in illegal markets, whether a “group person” or not, is considered to be active in “trade crime”. We make a distinction between “crime enterprises” and “criminal trading networks”, which we define as the collection of all enterprises that, in some specified way, conduct business on illegal markets. To avoid confusing levels of analysis, individual *members* of crime enterprises consisting of two or more people are not considered members of these “networks”. Networks refer specifically to the parties to specific transactions (i.e. enterprises whether they are one-man businesses or not).

much to be desired. Consequently, we refrained from making quantitative statements on the development of “organized crime” based on our own data. For this, we used standardized data from the HKS¹¹ registry. This information, however, did not lend itself to establishing relations between suspects. We used the data set as a means of gaining a more complete picture and applied our concepts quite informally.¹² We did use the findings to call attention to a particular form of banditry, which we termed “mobile banditry.” This refers to offender groups involved in cross-border “hit-and-run” property crimes. “Mobile banditry” was addressed in a follow-up to the CBA and will be discussed in a separate section below (KLPD/DNR 2005).

How many criminals? Where did they come from?

A graph showing the development of the number of registered suspects in the Netherlands who were born in the area of attention would suggest that the situation was deteriorating quickly. In the decade from 1996 to 2005, the number of suspects from Central European countries more than doubled while those from Soviet successor states tripled. The growing number of criminals largely corresponded with similar increases in the number of migrants to the Netherlands from these countries. The team’s findings, however, indicated that the relative share of criminals from post-communist countries remained modest. There were also indications that a significant number of the suspects still lived in their country of origin and so were not part of the expanding immigrant communities. Moreover, we found no sound reasons to expect that EU-enlargement would lead to a major increase in crime from new Member States.

Numbers of suspect by native country

Table 1 shows that the number of suspects from the former Soviet Union in the HKS police registry¹³ more than tripled from 592 in 1996 to 2,068 in 2002. This was equal to 1.16% of the total number of suspects (178,094).¹⁴ The information we collected from other sources (e.g. police registries and what is known as the GRIP registry, which contains data on detainees in Dutch prisons) suggests a fairly consistent pattern.

¹¹HKS is the Dutch acronym for *Herkenningsdienstsysteem* (Suspects Identification System). It contains files on persons charged with committing a crime and data on persons who were arrested as suspects on the basis of some form of documentation.

¹²The new approach led to a bulky file consisting of some 15,000 records on suspects, victims, other persons and the offences in which they were involved. Although the data did not allow quantitative statements, it did complement other sources. We pooled data from the NRI (National Criminal Intelligence Service), data from the Eastern Europe Department and other Dutch and foreign partners.

¹³HKS registration does not imply that criminal prosecutions against the subjects were initiated. KT NON (1999, p.68) contains HKS figures from 1991 to 1997. At the time, HKS registration was not up to standard (i.e. several districts did not register properly). Comparison of these figures with those presented in this report might be misleading.

¹⁴As suspects are registered according to native country, HKS-data do not always indicate the Soviet successor states from which they came. This is also the case with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (countries which have broken up as well).

Table 1 Registered suspects in HKS according to native country 1996–2002, resident in the Netherlands and elsewhere

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Percent in total in 2002	Index 1996= 100
Total suspects in the Netherlands	169,858	161,796	170,084	162,434	154,055	168,616	178,094	100	
Former Soviet- Union	592	660	734	1,244	1,582	1,998	2,068	1.16	349
Central Europe									
Hungary	68	77	77	77	63	63	59	0.03	87
Poland	616	698	734	694	676	932	1,245	0.70	202
Former Czechoslovakia	69	77	86	86	131	146	133	0.07	193
Total Central Europe	753	852	897	857	870	1,141	1,437	0.81	191
South Eastern Europe									
Albania	46	82	97	74	67	109	131	0.07	285
Bulgaria	35	45	46	47	97	181	406	0.23	1,160
Romania	168	142	162	197	152	196	323	0.18	192
Former Yugoslavia	2,160	1,890	2,267	2,275	1,806	2,021	1,904	1.07	88
Total South Eastern Europe	2,409	2,159	2,572	2,593	2,222	2,507	2,764	1.55	115

Source: KLPD/DNRI (HKS)

Suspects and detainees from former Soviet republics are usually Russians and Lithuanians, followed by suspects born in the three Caucasus republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Ukraine and Belarus. Estonia, Latvia and the five Central Asian republics are hardly represented in police data on Eastern European crime.

In the 1996–2002 period, the number of suspects born in Central Europe (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) doubled to almost 1,500. This was equal to 0.81% of the total number of suspects. Although the Balkan Peninsula was not included in the area of attention, for the sake of comparison, the CBA also contained figures on the number of suspects from Southeastern Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Rumania and the successor states of former Yugoslavia, excluding Slovenia). In total, 2,764 suspects came from the Balkans (1.55% of the total number of suspects). A limited increase can largely be attributed to growth in the number of Bulgarian suspects. Two-thirds (1,904) of suspects from the Balkan were born in the former Yugoslav republics. These figures put former Yugoslavia in fifth place and the former Soviet Union in sixth, after Suriname, Morocco, the Dutch Antilles and Turkey, as countries of origin of suspects who were not born in the Netherlands.

More recent figures from Statistics Netherlands (“CBS”) show an increase in 2003 to 2,604 suspects from the former USSR, followed by a moderate decline in 2005 to 2,511. In 2005, criminals born in the former Soviet Union accounted for less than 1.1% of all suspects registered. The number of Polish suspects nearly doubled from 1,245 in 2002 to 2,327 in 2005. Growth as a percentage of total suspects was less pronounced (0.7% in 2002 to 1% in 2005).¹⁵ We have no recent data on the

¹⁵In 2005, the total number of suspects in the Netherlands was 235,707.

Table 2 Number of registered crimes according to native country, 2002

Native country of suspects	Crimes in HKS	Share in total number of crimes %	Number of suspects	Number of crimes per suspect
Former Soviet-Union	6,125	0.43	2,068	2.96
Former Czechoslovakia	375	0.03	133	2.82
Hungary	258	0.02	59	4.37
Poland	3,330	0.23	1,245	2.67
Albania	493	0.03	131	3.76
Bulgaria	740	0.05	406	1.82
Romania	1,421	0.10	323	4.40
Former Yugoslavia	10,146	0.72	1,904	5.33
HKS Total	1,418,376	—	178,094	7.96

Source: KLPD/DNRI (HKS)

other Central European countries. Their numbers in terms of a percentage of total suspects should be fairly marginal. The CBA showed that in 2002 Polish suspects accounted for 85% of all suspects from Central Europe.¹⁶ The relatively high number of Polish suspects can be explained by the fact that there are simply more Poles than Czechs or Hungarians in the country and that Poland is relatively closer to the Netherlands when compared to Hungary or Slovenia.

Although numbers do not always indicate the seriousness of the problem, it is obvious that the Netherlands has not quite been overtaken by a flood of criminals from Central and Eastern Europe. The picture becomes even less disturbing when one looks at the numbers as a percentage of the total number of crimes committed. Table 2 shows that in 2002, Polish suspects, who made up 0.7% of all suspects, accounted for 0.23% of crimes committed. Suspects from the former Soviet Union, who accounted for 0.96% of all suspects, accounted for only 0.43% of all crimes. On average, criminals from the area of attention committed fewer crimes than other criminals.

Demographic developments

According to CBS figures, the growth in the number of suspects was mirrored by the increase in the number of migrants from the area of attention. In the 1996–2003 period, the number of persons from the former Soviet Union who settled in the Netherlands tripled to 40,000. The number of migrants from Central Europe increased by one-third to 56,000. It cannot be ruled out—in fact, it is highly probable—that the growth in the number of migrants to some extent explains the growth in the number of suspects. Nevertheless, caution is advised here. First, more

¹⁶From 1996 to 2002, the number of suspects from former Czechoslovakia doubled to 133. Recent CBS figures on Rumania and Bulgaria, which both joined the EU in 1997, had risen relatively sharply until 2002 (after visa requirements had been lifted). Total numbers, however, have remained fairly low, even decreasing in the 2003–2005 period (from 486 to 353 Romanian suspects and from 440 to 375 Bulgarian suspects).

than half of the Polish suspects in 2002 did not live in the Netherlands. This could involve crimes involving seasonal workers, who are not included in the figures on migrants as they are issued a work permit valid for a few months. Second, it is likely that a significant share of crime by non-resident Poles can be attributed to “mobile banditry” (see below). Third, some observers have indicated that there is little evidence that the immigrants from the various countries of the area of attention form distinct communities. Central and Eastern European immigrants go their own ways without involving themselves with former countrymen who also live in the Netherlands. There is no reason to believe that there is an expanding “community of immigrants” that provides some kind of cover or bridge for the crooks in their midst. One factor to be noted is that up to 60% of all immigrants are women. In many cases, these women are married to a Dutchman and are not involved in any criminal activity whatsoever (KLPD/DNR 2004, p.123).

The effect of EU enlargement

As the title of the CBA (“Crime without frontiers”) suggests, it focused particular attention on the expected effect of EU enlargement involving a number of former communist countries. Looking back, it might have been better to put a question mark at the end. In fact, the CBA questioned the assumption many seemed to entertain that the number of criminals from the eight accession countries was to grow significantly after 1 May 2004. First, the new Member States did not immediately join the Schengen area (free passenger travel) on 1 May 2004 because border control at the new external border at the time did not comply with EU standards. Existing control mechanisms were to remain in force and would only be dropped when the European Council had taken a positive decision about it. This decision would be based on an assessment of the state of readiness to implement the entire Schengen package. Second, for years, trends have shown that criminals from Central and Eastern Europe are acquainted with enough ways to quickly get into, move around within and leave the EU via green borders, by means of false or forged travel documents, or with a valid passport (as there is no visa requirement). As far as the development of crime is concerned, the discontinuation of visa regimes had more of an effect than EU enlargement was probably going to have. Border control is an important means of tracking down criminals, but it will not stop them. The picture becomes less optimistic when one looks at the effect of enlargement on smuggling. As the new Member States were also to join the Customs Union (free movement of goods), the CBA expected that smuggling goods from the new Member States to the existing Member States would become easier on 1 May 2004. Finally, a third reason why the CBA was not very pessimistic about the consequences of EU enlargement was the improved cooperation with the eight new Member States’ police services in preparation for accession.

Because crime from Central and Eastern Europe was no longer an area of attention of the National Crime Squad in the Netherlands after 2004, we have not been able to establish very thoroughly whether our expectations materialized, particularly with regard to the smuggling of goods. The number of criminals from Poland grew rapidly in 2004. It is difficult to assess the effect of accession. Growth

had already started in 2001 and decelerated again in 2005.¹⁷ It may simply be too early to tell to what extent EU enlargement has affected the number of criminals. The acceleration in growth observed in 2004 was probably related to increasing employment opportunities for Polish seasonal workers, which is a consequence of EU enlargement. Despite this fact, the number of Polish criminals remains limited, demonstrated by the fact that they only make up 1% of all suspects in the Netherlands. Furthermore, CBS data show that in 2005 the average number of crimes per suspect from Poland decreased from 2.7 to 1.5 per capita. This figure indicates that growth in the number of criminals from Poland does not imply higher levels of crime resulting from their activities.¹⁸ In as far as conclusions can be drawn from available data, we tend to uphold our assessment that EU enlargement in 2004 did not significantly affect the overall crime levels in the Netherlands.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Netherlands was not flooded with Central and Eastern European criminals. An increase in the number of suspects could only be expected, as levels in 1989 were almost nil. We should not jump to conclusions, however. From a policy perspective, it does not automatically follow that “there is no problem with Central and Eastern European crime and no special measures need to be taken.” The need for special measures would depend on the types of crimes suspects were committing and particularly on the issue of whether “post-communist crime” exhibits specific characteristics demanding a tailored response.

“Organized crime,” “corporate crime” and “banditry”

Now we turn to the data set we collected for the CBA and the casuistry of the KT NON team. As said, the quality of data in our set proved too poor to identify unambiguously groups that were hitherto not seen, which had been one of our aims. Our approach did help us to draw up a more complete picture. Some specialized agencies we received data from, had missed cases we did receive from other sources. Of course, we do not know how many cases never came to our attention.¹⁹

¹⁷HKS data show that in the 1996–2000 period, the number of Polish suspects rose by 10%, 38% in 2001, 34% in 2002, 18% in 2003 18% and 45% in 2004. In 2005, the rate suddenly returned to 10% (HKS data from KLPD/DNR 2004, p.128) and CBS data. In KLPD/DNR (2005, p.55), we present the HKS data as they were in 2005; the CBS data were published in 2006 and differ slightly from the HKS data. HKS reports 2,121 suspects in 2004, whereas the CBS counts 2,116 suspects. This is probably due to corrections made to the original HKS data set.

¹⁸KLPD/DNR (2004, p.134) and CBS crime data 2003–2005. The data did not contain the total number of crimes in 2005.

¹⁹The set consisted of more than 15,000 records on suspects, victims and other persons somehow “involved” in cases in which there was a tie with Central and Eastern Europe. Groups and types of crime were established using data and information from research reports, press releases and scientific research. For each type of offence the possible offender groups (combinations of suspects) were studied as well as the countries of origin of the suspects and victims, if available. The offender groups in question were subsequently categorized as having been involved in banditry, organized crime or corporate crime. For a more detailed account of our approach, please consult “Crime without frontiers”.

We used the file and the casuistry to determine the extent to which criminals cooperated in “combinations of suspects” to commit acts that could be classified as “organized crime,” “banditry” and “corporate crime.” We first discuss organized crime: To what extent did we encounter combinations of suspects that were involved in or facilitating the buying and selling wholesale quantities of illegal goods on illegal markets?²⁰ We then focus on “corporate crime,” which by and large concerns possible instances of financial service providers that seemed to assist in the laundering of money flows of Russian entities. We then discuss the issue of ‘banditry,’ “mobile banditry” in particular. For this discussion, we refer to the report on mobile gangs from Poland and Lithuania.

Organized crime: Central and Eastern European criminals on illegal markets

The findings largely confirm the team’s previous view of Central and Eastern European activity on illegal markets. In 1999, following large-scale research, the team concluded that Eastern Europeans were active in auto theft, but not always in an organized fashion. Traffickers in women seemed to be somewhat more organized, but there were no large criminal “organizations” active in this field. Eastern European criminals were completely absent in arms trafficking. They were also not heavily involved in the trade of narcotic drugs in the Netherlands (KT NON 1999). Below is a brief overview of the findings in “Crime without frontiers.” For a detailed account, please refer to the report.

- Narcotic drugs

The 1999 study, 2000 and 2002 follow-up reports and “Crime without frontiers” all left the impression that criminals from the area of attention were mainly active as buyers on drug markets. Dutch police have not found cases of criminals from the area of attention acting as wholesale suppliers of non-synthetic narcotic drugs. Nevertheless the number of cases of drug trafficking seemed to grow. It was difficult, however, to come to a definitive assessment since many of the files received did not specify the type of drugs involved. We received files on 36 combinations of suspects involving narcotics-related offences in 2002–2003. Eleven of these came from one regional district and concerned soft drugs and involved Central European seasonal workers who were hired by illegal hemp farmers.

The team’s casuistry included five instances of cocaine being transported from Latin America to the area of attention. Several Central and Eastern Europeans involved in cocaine smuggling by air as mules and couriers have been caught, but

²⁰Initially we tried to collect data on all “serious” crime (i.e. crime punishable by four or more years of imprisonment) involving Central and Eastern Europeans. However, we received data on almost anything. We filtered those cases involving two or more persons committing crime on illegal markets and tried to assess when this was a case of trade in high volumes of contraband. Data from other sources would sometimes provide additional understanding of cases that seemed to demand special attention in this respect. We do not think our approach will win awards and have to be very modest about the robustness of our findings. Nevertheless, we do think that it was conceptually sound compared to other approaches and that it did give us a broad picture of what was going on with regard to crime from the area of attention.

not on a large scale. We concluded that the picture concerning cocaine smuggling gave no cause for concern, although some alertness was required.

Information from liaison officers and open sources suggested that drug abuse, heroin use in particular, in Eastern Europe was growing rapidly. There were no indications, however, that heroin from the Netherlands had been exported to Eastern Europe, as the region is probably directly supplied from Central Asia. The police were not aware of any cases in which heroin was imported from the area of attention. This was at odds with a hypothesis put forward by a Western European police agency that Eastern European heroin smugglers were developing an alternative to the Balkan Route, known as the “Silk Route,” which ran from Central Asia through Russia to Northwestern Europe. Although the KT NON found no seizures that could substantiate this claim, a “northern route” might of course develop in the future.²¹

In the casuistry, offender groups from the area of attention did seem increasingly active on the synthetic drug market, i.e. production of precursor substances and pills in the Netherlands to be smuggled out of the country. One Lithuanian group organized the production of XTC and was involved in at least one serious murder case. There are cases involving Polish, Russian and Ukrainian criminals as well. In most of these cases, Dutch citizens were also involved.

- Human trafficking

“Crime without frontiers” confirmed the findings of previous studies of a continuous involvement of Central and Eastern Europeans in human trafficking with ties to prostitution. This is, however, particularly true as regards the origin of the victims. Offender groups came from the area of attention to a lesser extent. Such groups, most of which consisted of two to five persons, included a mix of nationalities. Women also showed up in the files as offenders. Dutch citizens were almost always involved in one way or another. Although it did not belong to our geographical area of interest, we did find a high and increasing involvement of offenders from Bulgaria.

- Human smuggling

Although smuggling routes run across Central and Eastern Europe, criminals from the area of attention were hardly involved in human smuggling into or via the Netherlands. Central and Eastern European involvement in human smuggling did not seem to go much further than their own national borders. There seemed to be involvement of Czechs in the smuggling of Chinese en route to the United Kingdom. This was the only case.

- Illegal trafficking of firearms

As firearms are not produced in the Netherlands, all weapons have to come from abroad. Several countries in the area of attention are production centers. Although the police have intercepted weapons produced in these areas, no involvement of criminals from the area of attention trafficking firearms to the Netherlands has been

²¹It could be noted that the name “Silk Route” is not entirely appropriate. The “Silk Route” was the trail from Central Asia to Antioch and Istanbul. The name more aptly describes the traditional route heroin follows before reaching the Balkan route from Turkey into Europe. It is not an adequate name for a route to Northwestern Europe.

established. Since the 1990s, former Yugoslavs have been conspicuously active in this area. It should be noted, however, that trade in firearms in the Netherlands has never been big business. Of those arrested for illegal possession of firearms, only a few were Central and Eastern Europeans.

- Cigarette smuggling

Since the 1990s, the crime team (and the Dutch customs authorities) identified several cases of cigarette smuggling with ties to Central and Eastern Europe. In these cases, the Netherlands functioned mainly as a transit country for cigarette smuggling to the United Kingdom, where excise duties were much higher than on the continent. KT NON 2002 discussed the findings of an analysis of several cases. The analysis indicated that Dutch criminals who had previously been involved in drug trafficking were active in cigarette smuggling. The conclusion also seemed justified that cigarette smuggling in some cases involved investors from Russia, who probably initiated smuggling lines, for instance, by acquiring a Dutch road transport firm. Presenting an update of this study, “Crime without frontiers” confirms the involvement of the area of attention in a number of cases.²² These numbers, however, have decreased. Dutch offenders and companies were almost always involved—as transporters, re-packers and administrators—in cases with ties to the Netherlands. Lithuanian authorities informed the crime team that proceeds in pound sterling had been found in their country, confirming the impression that cigarettes traveled illegally from the Baltic region to the UK.

- Illegal trade in plants and animals²³

There were indications that the Czech Republic plays a transit role in plant and animal trafficking. Russia plays an important global role as a transit port, source country and nowadays as a country of destination for endangered species as well. Despite this fact, there is little case history on the illegal trade of plants and animals in the Netherlands with links to the area of attention in the 2002–2003 period. Limited quantities of endangered plants were smuggled from the Netherlands to the Czech Republic in particular and of endangered species smuggled from the Czech Republic and Russia to the Netherlands.

“Crime without frontiers” concluded that when it comes to organized crime—defined as crime on illegal markets (wholesale markets in particular)—Eastern European criminals are or have been active in synthetic drugs, human trafficking and cigarette smuggling. It could not be established that these criminals were involved in wholesale heroin or cocaine trafficking, human smuggling, arms trade or environmental crimes.

²²Dossiers received from Dutch customs authorities identified the following countries of origin: Poland (12 dossiers), Lithuania (8 dossiers), Russia (6 dossiers) and Latvia (KLPD/DNR 2004, p.220).

²³There is little information about environmental crime such as dumping waste. There have been incidents involving the interception of radioactive scrap from the area of attention.

Corporate crime: financial crime

Requests for legal assistance with regard to financial crime mainly involved a wide range of fraud cases involving legal businesses active in the import and export of goods and services. In short, these were cases of corporate crime. The team itself collected 17 dossiers on financial crime. Six cases concerned suspicions of money laundering, involving sometimes highly complex international money flows. Other cases concerned investment (three dossiers),²⁴ business transactions (five dossiers, mainly involving false invoices) and only three dossiers related to illegal markets (tobacco, XTC and two cocaine cases).

The team's dossiers contained potentially interesting cases but in the end, the investigations were never concluded due to their supposed complexity. In particular, it proved difficult to obtain information from the Russian side on the origin of money flows. Without such information, there was "no case." Incompleteness of data was a problem as well. According to the Office for the Disclosure of Unusual Transactions ("MOT"), the number of unusual transactions with ties to the area of attention was not excessive when compared to other geographical areas. Data, however, were probably not very complete since reporting nationality is not a standard part of registering unusual transactions. In addition, it is too easy to circumvent the obligation to notify unusual giro transactions; the threshold is transactions involving 4 million and more.

It could not be denied however that in the mid-1990s and later, there were a number of cases of unusual money flows coming from the Russian Federation or related to Russian businesses going through the Netherlands (and other countries, in particular Cyprus, Switzerland). In 2000, one case involved suspicious transactions conducted by several legal persons for large Russian companies, involving a total amount of \$200 million. Based on cases like this and information from open and other sources, the problem was described as serious as there were clear indications that financial service providers in the Netherlands were active in this field. However, criminal proceedings were not initiated since it proved very difficult to retrieve information on the underlying crime. The unusual nature of these financial transactions was evident. So much was clear, but why and who was behind this? The Russian mafia?

The crime team's 1999 and 2002 reports discussed the origins of Russian flight capital, suggesting that there was nothing particularly peculiar about capital fleeing Russia or about the fact that export earnings of Russian firms were not being repatriated. There seemed to be well-founded reasons for Russian businesses to get their money out of the country. Russia's investment climate was terrible due not only to the activities of racketeers, but also to corruption, political turmoil and

²⁴We definitely cannot rule out the possibility that some Russian "biznizmen", criminal and non-criminal, have bought real estate, but no data set is available indicating who owns property, where they come from or which properties are involved. Field research by Siegel suggests that Russian business professionals settle in the Netherlands to relax or offer their families safe haven (Siegel 2002).

unpredictable, politicized taxation. For several years about \$1.5 to 2 billion dollars a month was being withdrawn from the Russian economy. It was not very plausible that ordinary gangsters had the assets that could generate such vast amounts of money. Allegations in CSIS (1997, p.25) and Galeotti (1996, p.6) that organized crime groups acquired large stakes in Russia's industries during privatization are not convincing. Russia's rapid voucher privatization of medium- and large-sized enterprises (in 1992–1996) was very much closed to outsiders (Blasi et al. 1997, p.119–120; Weenink and Correljé 1999). This goes *a fortiori* for the privatization of Russia's key industrial sectors—the energy and natural resource sectors—that were divvied up among a small group of bankers, who subsequently created what became known as Financial Industrial Groups. In 1992 the energy sector generated more than half of Russian GDP and its share rose in the following years when production in manufacturing industries collapsed. In fact, the manufacturing industries destroyed value.²⁵ Russia's primary industries were the generators of export earnings, these industries are the most likely sources of flight capital (Loungani and Mauro 2000, p.9). Indeed, as far as the crime team's casuistry was concerned, it had to focus on firms active in these areas to find who was behind the money flows.

Although the large suspicious money flows are most likely related to legal industries, the money was probably exported illegally. There seem to have been several cases in Russia in which large amounts of money were embezzled by state officials and expatriated. While this certainly qualifies as criminal behavior, we would refrain from calling it “organized crime.” Our reports suggested that the problem with financial crime in connection to Eastern Europe was not so much one of “organized crime” in its traditional meaning, but much more an issue of embezzlement and fraud by “corporate criminals” and bureaucrats. Publications warning about the “worldwide expansion of the Russian mafia” do not always make this distinction.

The problems the money flows from Russia posed for the outside world are threefold. First, the illegal nature of the money flows affects the integrity of financial service industries. Second, unknown owners invest in strategic industries in the West. Third, it perhaps becomes more difficult to distinguish between funds that do find their origin in criminal activities in Eastern Europe and the “less dirty” money flows.

²⁵“If all the oil, natural gas, gold, iron, and other metals that Russia produces this year were exported and sold at the prices prevailing on world markets, Russia would earn around about USD 110 billion. At the current exchange rate, that is 27 trillion rubles. But, at the rate of output in the first half of this year, Russia's total GNP in 1992 will be only 15 trillion rubles. In other words, the raw materials that Russia digs out of the earth are worth twice as much as every good and service the country produces. How can this be? Raw-material output is included in GNP. If GNP is the lower of the two numbers, it must be because industrial enterprises are subtracting, rather than adding, value to the raw materials they consume. By this measure, the country would be economically better off if every Russian worker, except those in the country's mining, oil and transport industries (who would be needed to ship raw materials abroad) simply stopped working” (*The Economist*, 25 October 1992, p.69).

Banditry and mobile banditry

The first threat assessment on Eastern European organized crime published by the KT NON (1999) established that the vast majority of crimes committed by Eastern Europeans and registered by the police from 1991 to 1997 involved theft/auto theft and organized shoplifting. Because the assessment focused on major offences, “records of criminal offences which may be assumed not to be in any way related to organized crime,” such as organized shoplifting, were removed from the database used to analyze the problem (KT NON 1999, pp. 68–69). Only the organized theft of cars was included in this research. It was determined that this offence was committed primarily by groups that resided in Eastern Europe. KT NON first mentioned the existence of organized groups of Polish ram-raiders in the 2000 CBA on Eastern European organized crime. The 2002 CBA states that there was “every reason to pay renewed attention” to the area of relatively light offences like theft and burglary (KT NON 2002, p. 120).

In order to have an adequate view of this kind of crime in the Netherlands, the KT NON started an intelligence project in October 2003 called the Polaris Project. The mission was to identify organized mobile gangs by gathering and analyzing information on relevant incidents and offenders from nine police regions in the northern and eastern provinces of the Netherlands. The project’s conclusion in July 2005 did not coincide with the end of this crime issue. The Polaris Project final report (KLPD/DNR 2005) concluded that the activity of mobile gangs from Poland and Lithuania stabilized and that, in some respects, the scale of activities decreased. This improvement, however, was not expected to consolidate. This section discusses some of the findings of the Polaris Project final report.

Under closer scrutiny, Polish and Lithuanian gangs in particular proved to be involved in more organized forms of relatively light offences. Criminal visitors from both countries were involved in organized shoplifting, Polish offenders were active in a series of evening car break-ins and Lithuanians were associated with auto and lorry thefts and passing counterfeit Euro notes in shops. Offender groups followed a hit-and-run strategy, committing a series of criminal acts in a short period of time, before leaving the country with the stolen gains. A general conclusion that can be drawn from the Polaris report is that in certain regions of several Central and Eastern European countries, criminal networks form mobile gangs in order to commit property crimes in the West. In some cases, goods or vehicles are stolen on assignment. Some gang members even work in salaried employment. A “customer” or “employer” can generate high profits from a large number of relatively small criminal offences. The risk of getting caught is small. Local authorities consider offences to be incidents and do not prioritize them. Even when caught, petty criminals from abroad are rarely ever prosecuted.

On a European level there is little aggregated knowledge available on this subject. In its 2004 European Union Organized Crime Report, Europol recognized the potential threat of organized petty crime and advised that more understanding be gained into this phenomenon (Europol 2004). In the Netherlands, gangs from Poland and Lithuania are most prominent, but there have also been groups from the Balkans. In recent years, Germany and Belgium have been very active in fighting mobile gangs. Germany established special forces (*Bekämpfung Osteuropäische Bandenkriminalität*)

and began working closely together with the local authorities in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to Polish and Lithuanian gangs, Germany also deals with groups from Latvia, Estonia, Belarus and Rumania. In Belgium, one-fifth to one-third of burglaries and ram-raids are attributed to traveling gangs from a variety of Eastern and Southeastern European countries. Since 2004, Belgium has prioritized the problem on a federal level ([Federal government of Belgium](#)).

Using two types of police sources, the Polaris report tried to estimate the scale on which Polish and Lithuanian mobile gangs operate in the Netherlands. First, it analyzed information on offenders from these countries who were not registered as residents of the Netherlands and the offences they were charged with. Second, it focused on the number of offences associated with mobile banditry to see if any relevant trends could be distinguished. The findings were compared with qualitative information from the Polaris database, which also included information on active groups that had not or not yet been arrested.

According to an annually published general analysis of offences and offenders registered in HKS, in the 1998–2003 period, 5% of all arrested offenders were not registered as a resident of the Netherlands. Following Western Europeans, non-resident offenders from Eastern European countries represented the biggest group in these years. The Polaris report indicated substantial growth in the number of Polish non-resident offenders, in particular, and—to a lesser extent—of Lithuanian non-resident offenders. In 1996, 268 non-resident Polish offenders ran afoul of the Dutch police; by 2004, this number had increased to 1,231 offenders. As far as the police know, 27% of the 2,147 Polish “criminal visitors” arrested between 1998 and 2003 committed more than one offence and 12% had been arrested more than once. The 445 Lithuanians reflect a similar picture (37% and 8% respectively). From October 2003 to December 2005, the Polaris registration counted 2,333 Polish and 845 Lithuanian suspects, the majority of which were reported by nine of the 26 police regions. Since the Polaris registration system is hardly suitable for quantitative analysis, these large numbers can only indicate that the HKS numbers presented above, only offer an impression of the minimum scale of this problem.

The criminal profiles of the registered population of Polish and Lithuanian non-resident offenders show that the majority of the offences they commit can be categorized as crimes against property with no use of violence. As mentioned above, HKS data showed that Polish offenders were mostly involved in shoplifting and car break-ins, whereas Lithuanians specialized in shoplifting, auto theft and passing counterfeit money. The Polaris team also gained intelligence on Polish and Romanian mobile groups specialized in breaking into parking meters at night, groups breaking into houses, groups specialized in pick-pocketing and stealing horse riding gear, boats or outboard motors.

Some general characteristics can be drawn from Polaris intelligence on 38 different criminal groups. At the time of arrest, most groups consisted of two to four persons. Analysis of, for example, telecom data or guest lists of accommodations used by suspects and, in the case of Lithuanian groups, information about border crossings, often showed that gangs consisted of several “teams.” The largest group consisted of 25 members who stole from electronics stores; another group had 19 members who specialized in stealing certain brands of luxury cosmetics. The criminal activities of mobile groups were often carefully planned. Some shoplifters and counterfeit money

gang members were recruited through newspaper ads and brought to the Netherlands where they were equipped with “working cars,” mostly with Dutch or German license plates. In general, the stolen goods of several “teams” were pooled and sent back to the home country in one shipment. In some cases, downloaded lists with addresses of shops or shopping lists with items to steal were found. The police also came across maps of the Netherlands indicating places to go and what areas had already been covered. Groups tried to cut costs by sleeping in their cars and stealing gasoline from parked cars or gasoline stations.

Measuring the material and immaterial damage done to society by mobile banditry is not an easy task. The Polaris Project final report attempts to do so based on the number of offences associated with mobile banditry solved. In 2002, 5% of all car break-ins were solved. In 2003 and 2004, Polish and Lithuanian non-residents were reported to be involved in 936 car break-ins; roughly 6% of all 15,034 car break-ins solved. Assuming that the general 5% rate of solving car break-ins is also valid for the Polish and Lithuanian break-ins, these groups committed 18,041 break-ins.²⁶ If the average amount of damage done to cars was €500, the total damage would be valued at €4.5 million. Similar calculations were performed for other offences, bringing the total material damage to €11.2 million in 2 years’ time.

The Polaris report concluded that the estimated material damage done by mobile criminal groups does not merit high prioritization. However, it should be realized that the damage affects a large number of victims. This type of crime affects citizens in a more direct manner than, for example, drug trafficking or money laundering.

In the years before Poland and Lithuania joined the EU, the members of criminal “petty” gangs, who were arrested, were usually deported pursuant to the Aliens Act. Interviews with Lithuanian law enforcement staff revealed that this policy actually encouraged rather than discouraged these criminals to come to the Netherlands. In fact, they were given a free ticket home. Results from the Polaris project taught that an active law enforcement policy on mobile banditry and the actual prosecution of gang members have proven to have a deterrent effect on mobile gangs. The high mobility of this type of crime suggests that pull factors such as a low experienced risk of being caught have a strong effect on choosing which country to go to.

Violence

In the early to mid-1990s, the assassination of Eastern European businessmen in the Netherlands and most certainly also in the Russian Federation, which at the time had the highest rate of international murder, seemed to confirm the impression that criminals from the area of attention were particularly violent. Although the number of suspects in the Netherlands was quite modest, it did not rule out the possibility that these suspects posed a serious crime problem with respect to violence and other serious offences.

²⁶This is 6% of the 600,680 reported break-ins in 2003 and 2004.

HKS statistics indicate that Eastern European criminals in the Netherlands are not particularly violent. As a matter of fact, in 2002, 6.5–7% of registered crimes committed by former Soviet and Central European citizens involved violence; the Dutch average was 10%. Moreover, crimes against property that do not involve violence are overrepresented for Central and Eastern European suspects and crimes against property involving violence are underrepresented. The average Dutch criminal is one-third to almost twice as violent as an Eastern European criminal visiting the Netherlands.²⁷

During the research period, a total of 13 combinations of suspects were identified that had been involved in armed robberies; this is a very small fraction of all armed robberies. The data set also contained 17 combinations that had been involved in cases of intimidation, blackmail and similar offences. It is probable that the police are still unaware of many of the incidents. There were cases of extortion of Russian businessmen in the Netherlands by a Chechen gang. In addition, asylum seekers and seasonal workers were sometimes confronted with similar problems. The expansion of legal work opportunities after 2004 will probably lead to a decrease in opportunities for extortion and racketeering with regard to seasonal work.

“Crime without frontiers” presents data regarding cases of murder and manslaughter committed from 2002 to 2003, in which either the victims or the offenders were from the area of attention. Out of a total of some 200 cases of murder and manslaughter in the Netherlands a year, 21 cases have links to the area of attention. Most of these cases were pretty low profile; 24 victims were counted. In eight out of the 21 cases, there was some link to illegal markets, but—with the exception of two—they probably did not involve wholesale trade. In 2003, there was a major case related to the illegal market for amphetamines involving a Chechen suspect who killed three business partners. The man was arrested and is now serving a life sentence. Another relevant case, also in 2003, involved the brutal murder of a Lithuanian man with ties to the synthetic drugs trade. This case involved an identifiable criminal group with ties to its homeland.

As the team on Central and Eastern European crime was established largely in response to the assassinations of Russian businessmen, it is interesting to see that such assassinations in the Netherlands all but stopped by 1999. The assassinations of the 1990s have never been solved, but investigations have suggested that they were related to racketeering in the Russian Federation, where buying protection (*krysha* or roof) from criminal groups or from elements of the state apparatus had become standard practice. The absence of new high profile murder cases in the Netherlands can probably be explained by the fact that in Russia, after almost a decade of “wild” transition to a market economy, the spoils have now been divided.

All things considered, the findings suggested that cases of murder or manslaughter involving victims or offenders from the area of attention generally concerned incidents that could not be related to wholesale trading on illegal markets.

²⁷Police intelligence data do not suggest that Eastern European criminals are overrepresented in serious crimes, but we have no detailed data on this issue. The Reference Index for Criminal Investigations (VROS) contains data on natural persons involved in serious crime and data taken from criminal investigation information. The data set is as confidential as it could be useful, and we only received totals for such broad categories as “Eastern Europe” and “Southeastern Europe”, the borders of which did not match our own. The data confirm our findings drawn from HKS data that criminals from the latter region are more often involved in serious crime than criminals from the area of attention.

More specifically, the data on murder cases so far do not indicate the presence of a “Russian mafia” trying to gain a foothold in the Dutch upperworld/underworld. There was, however, some reason for concern regarding the activities of Lithuanian gangsters. The team had no cases demonstrating that large “criminal organizations” from the Russian Federation were active in the Netherlands.

Conclusion

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Netherlands, like other Western European countries, has noted an increase in the number of criminals from Central and Eastern Europe. In 1999, the KT NON concluded that the problem was “serious, but limited” (KT NON 1999), a conclusion largely confirmed by follow-up studies. As the problem was almost non-existent during the Cold War, it could only be expected to grow.

When looking at the countries that “supplied” a relatively large number of suspects, Poland, Russia and Lithuania lead the list, followed by the Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Striking is that six of the eight new Member States, which joined the EU in 2004, have not “supplied” a large number of criminals. The “supply rates” of the 20 countries of the area of attention differ greatly. The relative shares in the total numbers of suspects in the Netherlands remain limited to around 1% for Poles and 1% for suspects from the successor states of the former Soviet Union.

Could growth in the number of suspects and immigrant communities enable criminals from the area of attention to gain a stronger foothold within the Netherlands over time? No certainty can be given here, but we found that in the case of crime from this region, ethnicity seems to play a much smaller role than in the case of say, criminals from Turkey or China. In so far Central and Eastern European criminals become entrenched in Dutch society, this does not concern their ethnicity, but the ethnically heterogeneous environment of certain criminal markets. We see no reason to expect that this pattern will change in the foreseeable future.

Crime from Central and Eastern Europe proved difficult to classify using traditional approaches to “organized crime.” Organized crime in the sphere of wholesale trading on illegal markets was only observed to a very limited extent. Mobile banditry is arguably the most serious manifestation of crime from post-communist countries and also the one that can only be tackled by a tailored approach that takes cross-border mobility into account. Corporate crime in the sphere of capital flight and money laundering is another phenomenon typical of post-communist crime. This problem is difficult to fight because so little is known as of the owners of flight capital. It can be said, however, that most money flows probably have no relation to Russian “organized crime” in the traditional meaning of the word.

We therefore tend to conclude that there is no Russian mafia in the Netherlands.²⁸ This might come as a surprise, at least for those who tend to treat seriously the idea

²⁸After extensive review of US police sources, Finckenauer and Waring (1998) reached the same conclusion for the USA: “Our conclusion—which may be startling to some—is that the Russian organized crime in America widely known as the Russian Mafia is first, not Russian; second, not a Mafia; and third, not even organized crime. *Russkaya mafiya? Nyet!*” (p.254). Cf. Siegel (2002) who also observes that westerners often simply think that all Russian citizens are Russian, while many of them are not ethnically Russian.

that this mafia is an expansionist entity, like the assessments of the CIA and Galeotti quoted in the introduction. The crime team most certainly did not find the “national prefect of the Russian mafiya in the Low Countries” that Galeotti observed. This is not to deny that crime is a major problem in former communist countries and the Russian Federation in particular. What we do suggest, however, is that one should be very careful in suggesting that this problem is exported to the outside world. Manifestations of crime that have been regarded as characteristic of the “Russian mafiya,” such as racketeering and financial crimes, probably originate from internal conditions. The large-scale institutional overhaul that the post-communist transition has involved and the dire straits communism left these societies in gave rise to these conditions. If this is correct, the implication might be that, first, some aspects of post-communist criminality are temporary by nature as they are a side effect of transition, and, second, that the internationalization of post-communist crime cannot be taken for granted since the “opportunities” in transitional economies are very different from those found in the West.

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